

The State of Opportunity in America: 2007 Update

In February of 2006, The Opportunity Agenda released The State of Opportunity in America, which assessed the nation's progress toward expanding opportunity for all. This report measured the progress along six dimension of opportunity – mobility, equality, security, redemption, voice and community. One year later, we find that significant opportunity gaps continue to persist in wages, education, housing, health care, and other areas. Americans generally believe that opportunity is available for everyone in the United States, regardless of circumstances at birth. But the nation is falling short of its egalitarian ideals, and millions of Americans are less likely than ever to achieve full opportunity.



Equal Opportunity (or Signs of Progress Toward It)

Demonstrated equality of opportunity (e.g., no significant differences in the conditions of opportunity by gender, race, income, or immigration status, should these data be available), or, far more commonly, when data trends suggested progress despite persistent historic inequality among gender, race, income, and immigrant groups.



Opportunity Stagnant (or Mixed Results)








Data for this indicator were generally unchanged, or when some aspects of opportunity as measured changed significantly for some segments of the population but not for others.




Opportunity in Decline





Data indicate both a general decline in opportunity and growing inequality.


Mobility | Status: Stagnant to Declining

MOBILITY	High School Degree Attainment ¹		Since 2004, there are fewer 25-29 year olds with high school degrees, and in some cases, racial and ethnic gaps have widened. For example, between 2004 and 2005, high school degree attainment for white men and women both fell about 1%, but declined 4% among African-American males.
	K-12 Education Segregation	N/A	No new data available
	Access to Early Child Care	N/A	No new data available
	High School Dropout Rates ²		Federal high school dropout data are controversial, as some scholars argue that dropout rates are far higher than what the U.S. Department of Education reports. But these data suggest that dropout rates are declining overall, notably among Hispanics, who saw dropout rates decline from 25.7% in 2002 to 23.8% in 2004. However, other racial and ethnic disparities persist, as African American dropout rates have increased from 11.3% to 11.8%.
	College Enrollment at degree granting institutions (full and part time) ³		Rates of college enrollment increased slightly from 2003 to 2004, consistent with a 25-year trend. A record 38% of 18- to 24-year olds were enrolled in college in 2004. Women and minorities continue to make modest gains. Over 2.5 million more women than men were enrolled in college in 2004, and college enrollment among Hispanic high school degree-holders increased from 31.7% in 2002 to 37.3% in 2004.
	Financial Barriers to College Enrollment ⁴		As a result of rising tuition costs and insufficient levels of need-based aid, the nation's colleges and universities have become less affordable since the early 1990s. Between 2004 and 2006, college affordability declined in 17 states.
	College Degree Attainment ⁵		The percentage of 25-29 year olds who completed a bachelor's degree or higher was relatively unchanged between 2004 and 2005; nearly one-third of U.S. women and about one-fourth of U.S. men hold college degrees. And although these percentages improved slightly among African-American men and women and Hispanic men, significant racial disparities remain: whites are still twice as likely as African Americans and three times more likely than Hispanics to hold a college degree.
	Distribution of Wealth ⁶		Wealth disparities increased between 2001 and 2004, consistent with a generally steady trend that began in the early 1980s in which wealth became increasingly concentrated in the top wealth classes, and declined among middle- and low-wealth groups. Between 2001 and 2004, the top fifth of wealthy households gained wealth (84.4% to 84.7% of total wealth from 2001 to 2004) while the bottom 4/5 lost wealth (15.6% to 15.3% of total wealth from 2001 to 2004).
	Where People Born into Poorest Families End Up	N/A	No new data available
	Racial/Ethnic Differences in Median Household Income	N/A	No new data available
	Homeownership ⁷		Homeownership increased slightly between 2003 and 2005, but a substantial racial/ethnic homeownership gap persists. In 2005, white homeownership increased to 72.7% from 72.1% in 2003. It increased among African Americans to 48.2% (from 48.1% in 2003) and among Hispanics to 49.5% (from 46.7%).
	Mortgage Lending	N/A	No new data available
	Subprime Lending	N/A	No new data available






	Women and Minority-Owned Businesses	N/A	No new data available
	Wage Distribution and Family Income ⁸		While family income increased for all groups between 2003 and 2004, it increased the most for the top 0.1% and top 0.01% of income groups (at 22.1% and 27.5%, respectively). At this rate, income grew nearly twelve times more rapidly among the top 1% of income groups than the bottom 90% between 2003 and 2004. This is consistent with trends that began in the early 1980s.

Equality | Status: Stagnant






EQUALITY	Gender Wage Gap ⁹		Real median earnings declined from 2004 to 2005 for both men and women, but the gender earnings gap remained just under \$10,000, with men earning \$41,386 and women earning \$31,858. With similar work experience, women still earn less overall. As in 2004, women continued to earn 77 cents for every dollar men earned in 2005.
	Racial/Ethnic Wage Gap	N/A	No new data available
	Women in Management ¹⁰		Women's share of "management, professional, and related occupations" increased slightly from 50.3% in 2004 to 50.6% in 2005.
	Racial/Nationality Profiling		Although national data regarding racial and ethnic profiling in the United States are not available, profiling persists. Most recently in Rhode Island, an analysis of 2005 police records by the ACLU revealed that a number of precincts searched minority drivers at a rate that was more than twice that of white drivers. ¹¹
	Racial, Gender Disparities in Prosecution, Sentencing of Drug Offenses	N/A	No new data available
	Racial Profiling in Enforcement of Immigration Laws	N/A	No new data available
	Racial/Ethnic Inequality in Juvenile Justice Systems	N/A	No new data available
	Racial/Ethnic Inequality in the Death Penalty	N/A	No new data available
	Housing Discrimination		National data documenting fair housing practices does not exist, but regional and local information highlight housing discrimination in rental markets across the nation. The National Fair Housing Alliance conducted audit studies in major metropolitan areas that identified racial discrimination in rental markets. ¹² In New Orleans, instances of housing discrimination have been documented in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. ¹³
	Employment Discrimination – Audit Studies	N/A	No new data available

	Employment Discrimination Complaints Filed with EEOC ¹⁴		The number of complaints filed with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission—not necessarily an indicator of actual instances of discrimination—based on race, gender, and national origin discrimination has decreased every year from 2003 to 2005.
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Voice | Status: Undetermined

VOICE	Voting	N/A	2006 data not yet available
	Political Activity	N/A	2006 data not yet available
	Gender Diversity: Congress ¹⁵		Two more women occupy seats in the U.S. Senate in the 110 th Congress than the 109 th , and six more holds seats in the U.S. House of Representatives. For the first time, a woman is elected Speaker of the House.
	Racial and Ethnic Diversity: Congress		The racial and ethnic composition of the 110 th Congress ¹⁶ is largely unchanged from the 109 th . There are currently 43 African-Americans (42 in the House, 1 in the Senate), 30 Hispanic Americans (27 in the House, 3 in the Senate), 9 Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders (7 in the House, 2 in the Senate), and 1 American Indian (in the House)—an increase of only one Asian-American legislator.
	Gender Diversity Among State, Local Elected Officials ¹⁷		In 2007, women hold 23.5% of state legislative seats, an increase of 0.7% from 2006, and hold 24.1% of other statewide elective offices, a decline of 1.0% from 2006.
	Racial and Ethnic Diversity: State, Local Elected Officials	N/A	No new data available
	Diversity in Newspaper Workforce ¹⁸		Minorities and women made slight gains between 2005 and 2006 in their representation in job categories such as supervisors, copy and layout editors, and reporters, but large gaps still remain. For example, 88.8% of supervisors were white and 64.5% were male in 2006, declining from 89.2% and 65.2% in 2005, respectively.
	Diversity in Radio and TV Broadcast News Media ¹⁹		Diversity in the radio broadcast news workforce continues to decline. In 2006, only 6.4% of the radio broadcast news workforce was minority, down from 7.9% in 2005. Women are also severely underrepresented in the radio news media workforce; in 2006, fewer than 1 in 4 radio news workers were women. Diversity in the television broadcast news workforce remains steady, but women and minorities remain underrepresented.
	Women, Minorities as News Sources	N/A	No new data available
	Diversity in Media Ownership	N/A	No new data available
Digital Divide	N/A	No new data available	






Redemption | Status: Declining







REDEMPTION	Number and Rate of Incarcerated Persons ²⁰		The United States continues to set new incarceration records. The number of incarcerated persons increased between 2005 and 2004, as did the rate (491 per 100,000 people in 2005 vs. 486 per 100,000 people in 2004).
	Women in the Criminal Justice System ²¹		The number of women behind bars continued to rise in 2005, surpassing 200,000 for the first time. Poor women and women of color remain disproportionately overrepresented among women in prison. US Total of Women Incarcerated Under State and Federal Jurisdiction: 2005: 107,518 2004: 104,822
	Drug Treatment for Prisoners	N/A	No new data available
	Juveniles in Prison ²²		Violent crime arrest rates have declined among all groups, particularly among youth of color. Between 1997 and 2003, the percentage of juvenile offenders in custody declined by 8% overall, 12% among African Americans, and 34% among Asian Americans.
	Voting Rights While Imprisoned		In 2006, 48 states, (excepting Maine and Vermont, and the District of Columbia), prohibit inmates from voting while incarcerated for a felony offense.
	Voting Rights After Imprisonment ²³		<p>Most states continue to deny voting rights to people convicted of felonies, even years after these individuals are out of the criminal justice system. In 2006:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 35 states prohibit felons from voting while on parole and 30 of these states prohibit those serving probationary sentences from voting as well. ▪ 3 states deny the right to vote to all ex-offenders; 9 additional states disenfranchise certain categories of ex-felons and/or require ex-felons to apply for restoration of voting rights after a designated waiting period. ▪ 5.3 million Americans have currently or permanently lost their voting rights as a result of a felony conviction. ▪ 13% (1.4 million) of black men are disenfranchised, a rate seven times the national average. ▪ 676,730 women are ineligible to vote as a result of a felony conviction. ▪ 2.1 million disenfranchised persons are ex-offenders who have completed their sentences. <p>Rhode Island voters approved a referendum to amend the state constitution and restore voting rights to persons currently serving a sentence of probation or parole.</p> <p>The Tennessee legislature amended the country's most complex restoration system by greatly simplifying the procedure. All persons convicted of a felony (except electoral or serious violent offenses) are now eligible to have their right to vote restored upon completion of sentence and may apply for a "certificate of restoration" from the Board of Probation and Parole. All applicants must also satisfy any court-ordered restitution or child support obligations.</p>





Community | Status: Undetermined

COMMUNITY	Volunteerism ²⁴		Volunteerism is largely unchanged between 2005 and 2004. In 2005, the average reported hours of volunteer activity per day for the total population was 0.14, and 7.3% of the population reported volunteering regularly. In 2004, 7.1% of people reported regular volunteer activity, with an average of 0.15 hours per day per population.
	Trust in Government	N/A	No new data available
	Public Attitudes Toward Immigrants, People of Color ²⁵		Despite general public consensus regarding egalitarian ideals and abhorrence of racism and xenophobia, negative attitudes toward some immigrants and people of color persists. A 2006 Harris poll found that while a clear majority of Americans (62%) are opposed to any policy that gives immigration preference based on country of origin, immigrants from some countries are seen by some U.S. adults to be more likely to make a better contribution than others. Immigrants from countries that are perceived to “make a better contribution than the others” are immigrants from Japan (26%), Britain (25%), Canada (24%), Germany (21%) and Australia (21%).

Security | Status: Declining

SECURITY	Poverty ²⁶		Rates of overall poverty have slightly decreased from 12.7% in 2004 to 12.6% in 2005. In 2005, an estimated 36,950,000 people in the United States lived in poverty, nearly a million fewer than 2004 estimates.
	Gender Gaps in Poverty ²⁷		While the percentage of men below the poverty line decreased between 2004 and 2005, the percentage and number of women in poverty increased – and the gender poverty gap deepened. Estimated percentage below poverty: 2005 Male: 11.1%; Female: 14.1% 2004 Male: 11.5%; Female: 13.9% Estimated number below poverty: 2005 Male: 15,950,000; Females: 21,000,000 2004 Males: 16,399,000; Females: 20,641,000
	Racial/Ethnic Poverty Gaps ²⁸		While the percentage whites below poverty declined, poverty among most minority groups increased or stayed the same, increasing the racial and ethnic poverty gaps.
	Poverty by Citizenship Status ²⁹		The percentage of naturalized citizens living at or below the poverty level increased between 2004 (9.8%) and 2005 (10.4%). Poverty among non-citizens declined slightly from 21.6% in 2004 to 20.5% in 2005, but poverty rates remain twice as high as that of naturalized citizens.
	Workers in Poverty ³⁰		The percentage of people who work full-time yet live in poverty (2.8%) remained the same between 2005 and 2004.

Child Poverty ³¹		Rates of child poverty decreased slightly between 2004 and 2005, falling from 17.8% to 17.6%; an estimated 45,000 fewer children lived in poverty in 2005.
Bankruptcy	N/A	No new data available
Pension Participation	N/A	No new data available
Retirement Savings Participation	N/A	No new data available
Life Expectancy – Overall and by Subgroup ³²		Life expectancy increased slightly between 2003 and 2002 for all groups, with African-American women experiencing the greatest gains (75.6 years in 2002 to 76.1 years in 2003). But significant racial and ethnic gaps remain.
Mortality – Overall and by Subgroup ^{33, 34}	N/A	Mortality rates declined between 2002 and 2003, but significant racial and ethnic gaps persist.
Infant Mortality – Overall and by Subgroup ³⁵		Infant mortality declined overall between 2003 and 2004, but some racial and ethnic minorities continue to experience high infant mortality rates. For example, African-American infant mortality rates in 2004 remained about 2.5 times higher than white infant mortality rates.
Physically Unhealthy Days – Overall and by Subgroup ³⁶		Overall average of physically unhealthy days remained unchanged between 2005 and 2004, but a significant gender gap persists, as women experience 30% more unhealthy days than men, and unhealthy days remain 60% more common among Native Americans than the national average.
Health Insurance Coverage ³⁷		The number of Americans lacking health insurance increased from 45.3 million in 2004 to 46.6 million in 2005. In 2005, about 1 in 7 Americans (15.7%) lacked health insurance. Non-Hispanic whites (11.2%) had the lowest rates of uninsurance, but African Americans (19.5%), American Indians and Alaskan Natives (29.9%), Asian Americans (17.7%), Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (21.8%), and Hispanic Americans (32.6%) were disproportionately uninsured.
Reproductive Health Care	N/A	No new data available
Occupational Safety	N/A	No new data available
Affordable Housing ³⁸		<p>Affordable housing remains a crisis for low-income communities. Even <i>two jobs</i> at today's minimum wage is insufficient to afford today's rent:</p> <p>Income Needed to Afford a One bedroom: \$28,475 Two bedroom: \$33,925</p> <p>Income at the current minimum wage of \$5.15: One job: \$10,712 Two jobs: \$21,424</p> <p>Income at the proposed minimum wage of \$7.25: One job: \$15,080 Two jobs: \$30,160</p> <p>In 2005, there were only four counties in the nation where a person working full time at the minimum wage could</p>

			afford a one bedroom apartment. Today, there is not a county in the country where a full time minimum wage worker can afford even a one bedroom apartment at the fair market rate. ³⁹
	Subprime Lending and Fair Access to Home Loans ⁴⁰	N/A	No update available since <i>The State of Opportunity</i> , but the volume of subprime loans – which generally increase low-income communities' access to loans but have been associated with predatory lending practices – has grown from \$210 billion in 2001 to \$652 billion in 2005. Low income, immigrant, and racial and ethnic minority communities continue to have higher rates of these loans than moderate income and high income communities. ⁴¹
	Food Security – Overall and Children ⁴²		Food insecurity – lacking enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members – declined slightly from 11.9 percent of households in 2004 to 11.0% in 2005, while the prevalence of very low food security remained unchanged at 3.9%. About 13 million children (18%) lived in households that were at times classified as food insecure in 2003.
	Homicide ⁴³		The U.S. homicide rate has remained generally stable since 1999, but low-income groups and communities of color continue to experience far higher homicide rates. For example, African-American homicide rates are 3.5 times higher than white Americans, and the number of black male murder victims increased nearly 9% between 2004 and 2005.
	Violent Victimization ⁴⁴		Rates of violent crime declined for most of the nation between 2003 and 2004, before rising 2.3% between 2004 and 2005. In 2005, women experienced a slightly lower rate of violent crime (17.1%) than in 2003 (19%), as did African Americans (29.1% vs. 27.0). But poor women and communities of color continue to be far more likely to be victimized.
	Intimate Partner Violence ⁴⁵		Between 2002 and 2004, the rates of intimate homicide was largely unchanged; minority women and women living in poverty continue to be disproportionately at risk.
	Environmental Degradation	N/A	No new data available

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⁴ National Center for Public Policy and Education, “Measuring Up 2006: The National Report Card on Higher Education.” Available http://measuringup.highereducation.org/docs/2006/NationalReport_2006.pdf, January 2007.

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⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Economic Policy Institute, “Family Income,” *The State of Working America 2006/2007*, Available http://www.stateofworkingamerica.org/swa06-01-family_income.pdf, January 9, 2007.

⁹ US Bureau of the Census, US Census Bureau News, “Income Climbs, Poverty Stabilizes, Uninsured Rate Increases,” August 29, 2006, http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/income_wealth/007419.html

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